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114TH COMMENCEMENT

Middlebury College Graduates Class of 46
Men and Women

The 114th commencement of Middlebury college began Sunday morning at 10:45 in the Congregational church when President John M. Thomas delivered the baccalaureate sermon before a large congregation. His text was:

"When I was a child, I spake as a child; I felt as a child, I thought as a child; now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things." I Corinthians 13:11

The sermon in part was as follows: "I do not plead that college men merely retain respect for the church as an institution which has claimed the devotion of many rare spirits and which has been of great service to society; that they continue to reverence the Holy Bible, because it has been a useful text book of morals in the education of the race, or because it contains passages of great literary beauty and power; nor that they merely treat with consideration the doctrines which have sustained noble souls and which have commanded the respect of many great minds. Religious manhood demands a more vigorous attitude than this. It requires earnest and thorough effort to think through religious questions for one's self, to work out a personal creed that shall be the expression of his own conviction on the important problems of life with which religion is concerned. I am aware that creeds are not highly in favor in these times. It is popular to reproach them as refuges for timid spirits, as attempts to stifle investigation and check the progress of free thought, as ministers of unjust authority over the mind and conscience. I do not deny that they have been so employed, but the fault has been in the spirit of those who used them wrongfully. The mis-use of any institution or practice does not prove that it may not have a true and proper use. A creed is simply a formal statement or definition of the convictions of an individual or an association of individuals. Every man has one, whether he realizes it or not. It may be very vague or indefinite, perhaps inconsistent and illogical, but as a working theory of life it is present nevertheless and seriously affects his conduct.

"The creed of an earnest man, who has attained some measure of knowledge of the world's thought and life, should not be vague and illogical, but definite and clear, and in harmony with his knowledge in other spheres, and expressive of the spirit of his life. Large portions of it may be in forms which have been hallowed by time. Some articles may be adapted from the confessions of the past, with new meanings attached to many terms, but held in no less sincerity. Other convictions will be new, one's very own, forged from his own observations and experiences, and held in the same fixity and courage with which the saints of older days testified to the faith which God delivered to them. It is the truth which claims our reverence, not of necessity that which is old, nor yet that which is new, but that which commands our minds and holds our conscience as in harmony with the reality the great God has enabled us to see.

"There are realities in this world, challenging our attention, upon which we must make pronouncement. We must have some thought about the world itself, the vast mass of things, whether it is intelligible or no, whether it is a thing of system and order or law, or of chaos and chance. It has been testified that there is a spirit in all things, that mind is master and that matter is its slave. The opposite testimony has been rendered, that spirit is a delusion and that which seems mind is the manifestation of matter. These views have consequences and shape the manner of the men who hold them. "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." A man must place himself on one side or the other. He must live, and the spirit or the flesh must command his life. We must choose some day whom we will serve, and that choice should be deliberate and thoughtful, with regard to all the evidence from every source, with the pitiless use of logic and all the powers of mind with which we are endowed. Such an issue is not to be determined by impulse or sentiment, by tender associations or by gentle feelings. If Baal be God, follow him, despite all consequences. Let a man use his mind, and all that is mature and strong within him. Let him read the scriptures with open intelligence, shielding no fact from the light, refusing no information from any source as to the truth of the history, the nature of the writing, the worth of the ideals therein set forth. If the Bible is not depend-

able, if it be not worthy of reverence, let us find it out. We do not want a guide we suspect can not be tried and proved, which we are holding merely to please some old-time friend or because of the pious custom of the past. Let a man read the gospels and study the words and character of Jesus Christ with the freest mind and a judgment as devoid of prejudice as he can make it. If the Galilean master be but one of the heroes of history, let us know it. If his precepts and commandments be not suited to the enlightenment of the centuries, let us discover that. If they have been mistaken who have seen in him the image of God, we do not want to follow their mistake. We want to see him face to face, and if we reverence him, we want to reverence him with all our being, as one who commands the homage of our souls, and not feebly testify.

"This I have read in a book, he said, and that was told to me. And this I have thought that another man thought of a Prince in Muscovy."

"The enemy of faith is not thought, but lack of thought. Baal is not God, and you will not conclude so if you think. There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty giveth him understanding. The idealists and the poets of the ages have not been fools. There has been reality back of their insights. The world did not choose its scriptures by mistake, and in the thick of life, meeting its battles bravely and summoning your will for the duties of a man, you will not throw away a book which testifies the moral law and whose every page is a summons to high courage and buoyant hope." You will need it. Life will press its need upon you, and the more you test it and live by it, the more compelling will be to you its truth. The Nazarene is not one of many. God is still in Him, reconciling the world unto himself. There is yet no other name given among men whereby the conscience is so melted to repentance, and whereby the forgiving love of the eternal God is so ministered graciously to the needy spirit.

"Our own particular generation has need of mature and thoughtful faith, not the creature of tradition and authority, but the reasoned conviction of men who are determined to be men, put away childish things and arrive at the stature of manhood in religion not less than in other matters. The passion of the age is in two fields, first economic, industrial, commercial, and secondly social, charitable, and philanthropic. The earnest workers of today seem to be divided into two camps, the one striving to promote the wealth of the world and all that furthers industrial and commercial progress, the other eager for all that makes for social reform and proposing often seemingly radical and violent plans for the correction of abuses and the establishment of an age of even justice and general welfare. There is much misunderstanding and consequent conflict between the two. To the masters of industry, the builders of railways, the merchants and bankers, the social reformers seem misguided enthusiasts, enemies of business, impractical iconoclasts, who, if they had their way, would pull down the pillars of society upon themselves and everybody else, and destroy all prosperity and civilization itself. To the social workers, on the other hand, the men of business, at least in the person of their leaders, appear little better than thieves and robbers, blind followers of a cruel social order, princes of unequal privilege and priests of exploitation and oppression.

"On both sides there is strange short-sightedness as to their lack of sufficient goal. Business is not an end in itself, neither little business nor big business. It has to do with the means of life, not with life itself. He was a fool who had much goods laid up for many days, and rested his ambition there. The truth that man can not live by bread alone is commonplace. Strangely enough the social reformers who condemn the materialism of our industrial and commercial life are often equally materialistic. They too have no sufficient goal. Their ambitions are limited by food and clothing and the supply of material wants, only they are concerned with these in different proportions and far different classes of society. The things which the Gentiles seek are their goal, not less than in the offices of great corporations. They deal in the same terms, although in different measures.

"There is a further question, a higher question, which should be brought home to both. What is beyond? What

(Continued on Page 4)

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